*173 something whose strangeness places it outside our [24] understanding or what is worse, not to be deceived into interpreting this incoherent jumble simply to fit a preconceived theory.

*173 814 To these reflections of the native mentality must be added the deformations in the hands of the collectors of historical traditions (1): the dyeli among the Bambara. This word dyeli,

1. Here called "traditionists."

meaning "master," shows the esteem accorded, in principle, to the archivist, which is what each dyeli should be. Indeed the job consists essentially in preserving from oblivion the genealogy and in celebrating -- by magnifying them -- the achievements of the personage to whom the dyeli is attached. As a result, the dyeli extends his inquiries to all who come into contact with his lord, so that in fact he becomes the historian of an entire family, an entire clan and even an entire tribe.

●[555] The dyeli's great erudition and, even more, his skill in making the most of his superficial knowledge bring it about that the esteem in which he is held takes the practical form of gifts -- often so considerable as to make the dyeli very prosperous indeed. Therefore, the majority of dyeli, being less anxious to safeguard truth than to increase their own fortunes, flatter or slander, as required, those on whom they impose their services, so as to profit as much as possible. It is because of this sort of corruption that the dyeli is often scorned.

Dyeli who have kept their integrity are rare; those who possess extensive knowledge and sufficient critical sense to make a wise selection from the mass of contradictory traditions are rarer still.

In general, each dyeli works only within the very restricted limits of a clan tradition, plus a few family traditions; he is entirely ignorant of anything that concerns neighboring clans and families and, especially, people outside his own tribe and race.

The dyeli preserves in his memory the historical tradition and hands it down. Thus, since each dyeli works entirely independently, he can add any fantasies he pleases, spread them abroad, and pass them off for truth, which is accepted as such and passed on by others.

621 The palavers and deliberations are long, but the choice is a
793 happy one; the old man chosen as gnéna-n-sonnaba always has the
555 slyness and guile characteristic of the Bambara type. Patient and likeable, he will know how to be just and impartial in disputes, diplomatic and sufficiently master of himself to say only what he intends to. He will know how to acquire the reputation of an upright man who does not know theft or falsehood.

621 Elected for life to hold both civil and religious power, he is
793 truly the head of the village, the dougoutigi. His position is hereditary; it passes from brother to brother and, when there are none, goes by right to his oldest son. The one who is to succeed him becomes his aide (siéré), and the heads of families (gouatigi-ou) compose his council; they are always summoned when a question is to be handled or a decision made.

The Choice of the dasiri fetish and its sacred mount

776 The new village has a head, his aide, and its council; it is
778 organized. Now they must find out the whereabouts of the spring,
787 rock, or tree where lives the protecting spirit, the dougou dasiri (1),

1. Dougou dasiri: /dougou/, "village"; da, "mouth," "entrance"; siri, "bind."

who fastens the entrance to the village and watches over it. For this knowledge the people appeal to a sorcerer; he has intimate contact with the spirits, knows their ways and customs, and understands their language.

There are many sorcerers, and they do not all work in the same way. One discovers his oracles in the entrails of a hen, a second traces cabalistic signs on ashes, a third endlessly moves little stones, bones, and cowrie shells, counting them again and again. To locate the dasiri, people have recourse to the flélikéla (2) diviner, who

2. Flélikéla, "to look attentively, curiously."